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Introduction

An Historic Opportunity

The creation of the San Diego River Park is an unprecedented opportunity to take the first steps toward reconnecting the San Diego region with its namesake waterway. With the guidance of the San Diego River Park Foundation and support of the San Diego River Coalition, the San Diego River Conservancy, the San Diego River Park Alliance, and the people and members of interested organizations who live within the watershed, the Park is on its way to becoming a reality. The San Diego River Park will aim to shift how the river is envisioned and understood throughout its watershed, and the City of San Diego is at the forefront of this effort. Envisioned as a waterway that is healthy, accessible to the public and active with wildlife, the San Diego River can reassert itself as the focus of the valley and an asset to the community. The river can once again become a place to visit, live, work and play in the valley itself.

Vision

The San Diego River today is an impacted and managed system severely altered and constrained by mining, flood control and increasing development pressure. Commercial, residential and industrial uses have expanded in the valley floor, encroaching on the river's edge. Although mining activities are being phased out of the valley, flood control and development pressure remain constant issues. These conflicting needs in the valley have compromised not only the integrity of the river and the wildlife habitat it supports, but also the value of the river as a community resource.

The establishment of the San Diego River Park can reverse this trend; it will return the river to the people, integrate the river valley into the life and landscape of San Diego. As the water and the rich alluvial floodplain drew the Kumeyaay people to the valley thousands of years ago, a healthy riparian environment interspersed with trails, parks and open space, all united by a flowing, clean river, will draw the people of the San Diego region back to the river.

This new park will create a string of parks linked by open space, trails, and green corridors; a multi-layered system that will serve a variety of needs, offering recreational, environmental and habitat benefits. This system of 'interconnected parks' has proven successful across the nation, in Minneapolis' Chain of Lakes, Boston's Emerald Necklace and Esplanade, and Denver's Park and Parkway system.

The San Diego River Park will draw upon San Diego's coastal location, enhancing the ocean edge that has historically defined the City and extending this character inland. It will allow people to see and interpret

the river's natural transitions as it flows from mountain to canyon to ocean, making the river processes visible and accessible to all visitors. Creating the River Park must also look beyond the bounds of the City and this study area. It is essential to understand the context of the entire watershed system and the canyons and creeks that are tributary to the San Diego River. The efforts to clean the river, create habitat connectivity and trail continuity must consider all of the areas that link to it and all waters that flow into it.

The experience of nature and City will be joined together in the San Diego River Park system, creating a natural corridor within the urban milieu. Like San Diego's other great parks-- Balboa, Mission Trails and Mission Bay—the San Diego River Park will provide a natural resource that becomes a part of the day-to-day life of the City, a place of the City rather than a place apart from the City.

Project Origins

The vision for the San Diego River Park is the culmination of many years of effort and discussion by dedicated members of surrounding communities. The concept of preserving the river valley as a dedicated and protected open space first generated discussion in 1975 when Kevin Lynch published *Temporary Paradise, A Look at the Special Landscape of the San Diego Region*. This report reflected the author's subjective observations of the regional landscape; while the report resulted in little action, it did lay the groundwork to begin thinking of a long-term vision and plan for the river valley.

In 2001 The San Diego River Park Foundation was formed to coordinate the efforts of the many community groups and other organizations dedicated to the San Diego River and to work toward making the San



Dog Beach at Ocean Beach

Diego River Park a reality. A community-based, grassroots non-profit organization, the Foundation provides organizational and financial support to projects that will help to establish this river-long park. The Foundation works with local groups to encourage stewardship of the riparian environment and supports projects that will restore and enhance the river, provide community facilities, and create opportunities for citizens to learn about the rich history of the San Diego region.

In the same year, Mayor Dick Murphy of San Diego invited Federal, State, County, City of San Diego and City of Santee elected officials to form the San Diego River Park Alliance. The Alliance provided support on political issues relating to the creation of the San Diego River Park, and hopes to see a San Diego River Park extending from its headwaters in the Cuyamaca Mountains to its mouth at the Pacific Ocean.

With the support of the San Diego River Park Alliance, the Coastal Conservancy and the San Diego Foundation, the San Diego River Park Foundation and San Diego River Coalition initiated an effort to develop a Conceptual Plan for the entire San Diego River corridor. Engaging the 606 Studio program, a group of third year graduate students and faculty in the Department of Landscape Architecture at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, a framework was created through extensive community workshops throughout the river corridor. The result of this effort, the San Diego River Park Conceptual Plan, outlines the broad goals and objectives for the San Diego River Park, focusing on the stretch from El Capitan Reservoir to the Pacific Ocean. These goals, synopsized in the following pages, serve as the basis for the preparation of this Master Plan focusing on the river within the City of San Diego. The Conceptual Plan was approved by the San Diego River Coalition and unanimously accepted by the San Diego River Park Alliance.

The effort to protect, preserve and enhance the San Diego River and its watershed was spearheaded by six organizations, listed below.

San Diego River Park Foundation

The Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization that is the host and chair of the San Diego River Coalition meetings. It acts in the capacity of a resource to the numerous groups working to establish the San Diego River Park and to the community in general. It is a central repository and clearinghouse for information and maintains the www.SanDiegoRiver.org web site.

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San Diego River Coalition

The mission of the San Diego River Coalition is to preserve and enhance the San Diego River, its watershed, and its natural, cultural, and recreational resources. This coalition of non-governmental organizations acts as the Citizens’ Advisory Committee for the San Diego River Park. The Coalition holds public meetings to discuss progress and potential projects with many of the governmental and quasi-governmental entities working on river issues in attendance and with active citizen participation.

San Diego River Conservancy

This new state agency, created to work on the entire length of the San Diego River Park, has a governing board of nine voting and two nonvoting members. The Conservancy’s members include state officials, local elected officials, and community members.

San Diego River Park Alliance (Inactive)

Formed and chaired by Mayor Dick Murphy, this organization addressed policy issues relative to the establishment of the San Diego River Park. Members of the Alliance included local, state and federal elected officials, the Executive Director of the San Diego River Park Foundation, and Helix Water District, which has significant land holdings along the San Diego River.

Select Committee on Parks and River Restoration (Inactive)

Chaired by Assembly Member Christine Kehoe, this group included other members of the California Assembly interested in park and river issues. The Committee studied how the State of California could best assist with issues related to the San Diego River.

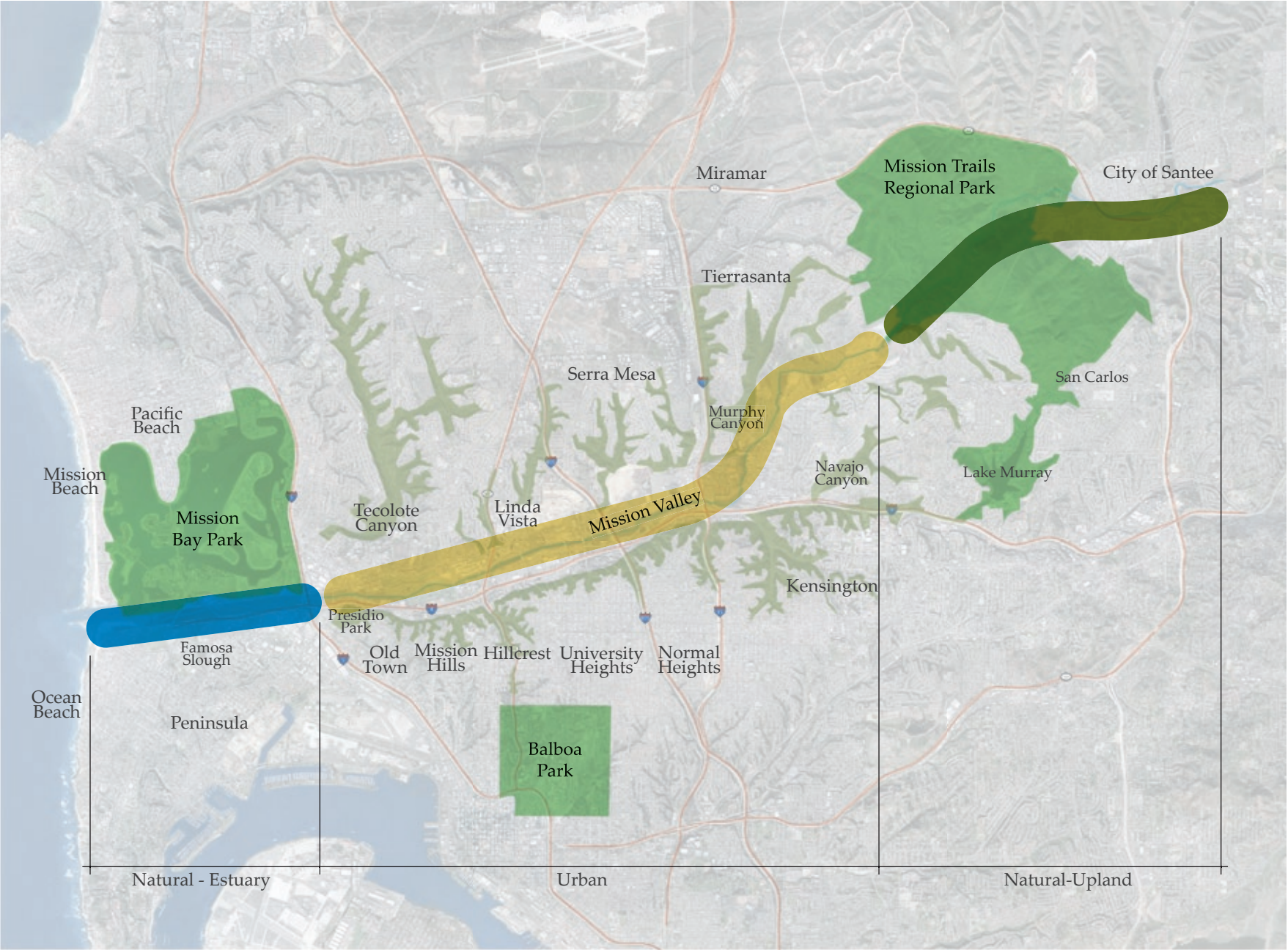
San Diego River Watershed Workgroup

A County-led workgroup, this body includes interested individuals, organizations, and agencies who are working to develop a management plan for the San Diego River Watershed. Although the Workgroup’s efforts are separate and distinct from the San Diego River Park, this group will incorporate the San Diego River Park into its plans.

Project Description

In September of 2003, the City of San Diego initiated a nine-month study to prepare a plan for the San Diego River within the City of San Diego. This effort, the San Diego River Park Draft Master Plan, is spearheaded by the Civitas consulting team and will provide guidance to the City of San Diego in taking the incremental steps necessary to implement the San Diego River Park.

This Plan will also inform the City’s ongoing planning processes and assist City and outside agencies in working toward a healthier river environment. The Plan will construct a framework that adjacent communities can use to set policy on riverfront land uses within their boundaries and encourage coordination between San Diego River Park planning and other future development along the length of the river corridor.



City of San Diego Context

The Master Plan planning area includes both public and private property, and it should be noted that private property owners have specific property and development rights. The Master Plan supports working with these private property owners to determine the course of future development and re-development projects. The Master Plan seeks to implement the goals of the river park in a way that will meet all approved plans and goals while also respecting each land owner's rights.

Report Organization

The Master Plan report is organized in three major sections: Principles, Recommendations, and Implementation.

The seven Principles will guide the City's San Diego River Park planning and implementation. These principles are the overarching goals against which all decisions should be tested.

The Recommendations section identifies a series of recommended actions and projects that are necessary to move the Plan from concept to reality. These recommendations are divided into two sections that deal with the river as a whole, and with the unique needs of each river section, or reach. It is important to note that while each recommendation fits into a larger, comprehensive vision for the river, no single recommendation is meant to address every location or every situation along the length of the river corridor. The Master Plan's single overarching recommendation is one of flexibility, seeking opportunities as they arise with property owners to implement the Plan's ideas.

The Implementation section of the document describes the potential phasing and prioritization of the recommended actions.

This report is the synthesis of a nine-month process. Much more work remains to bring the entire San Diego River Park to fruition. Additional studies, outlined in the Implementation section of this document, will follow this Master Plan effort.



Planning Area

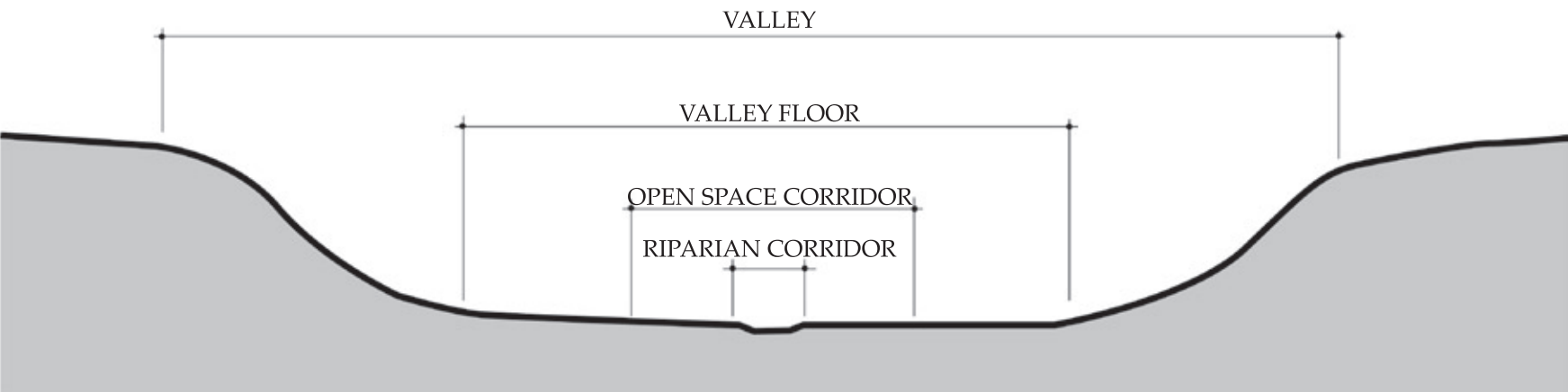
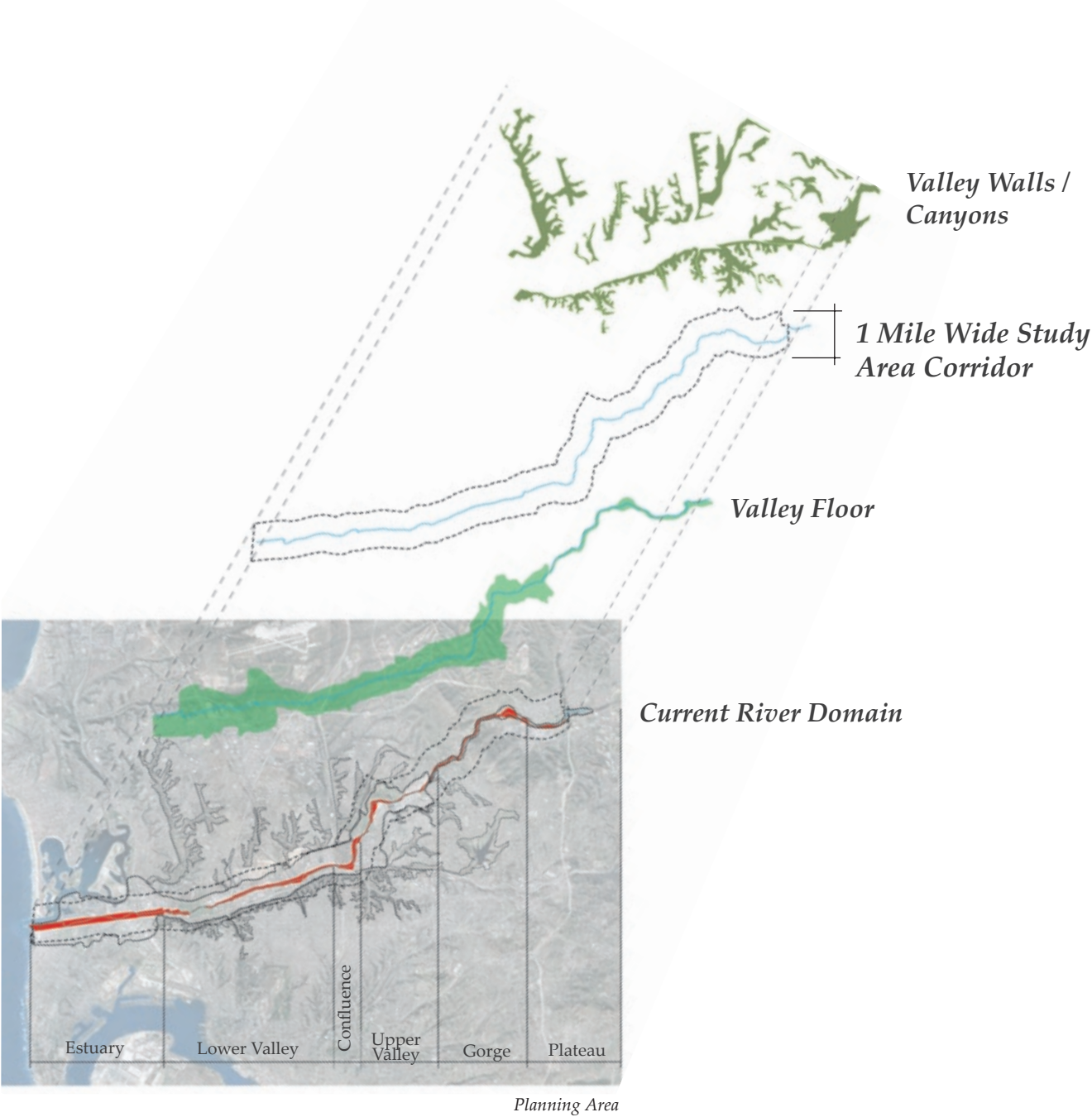
The Plan focuses on the section of the San Diego River within the boundaries of the City of San Diego extending from the Pacific Ocean at Mission Bay to the City of Santee. The project area is defined as a corridor extending one-half mile on each side of the river. This one mile wide area is consistent with that defined by the San Diego River Conservancy to where funding can be applied. However, the area of interest and influence extends well beyond this half mile limit. To be comprehensive, the Plan must consider the area of influence. This area relates to the topography of the river valley, its adjacent canyons and the remaining open space of the uplands. Tecolote Canyon, Murphy Canyon, Ruffin Canyon, Alvarado Canyon and Navajo Canyon are areas that offer significant potential to substantially improve connections between the canyons and the San Diego River valley.

The project area is bookended by two major parks, Mission Bay Park and Mission Trails Regional Park. These parks have significance not only to the city, but to the region and beyond, and can be linked by the San Diego River Park. The resulting context is an urban river corridor framed by the natural estuary and natural upland character of Mission Trails Regional Park.

One of the great challenges of creating the Park lies in the fact that much of the land along the river is in private ownership. It is critical that efforts are made to work with the owners of these parcels to open the corridor to public access, either through acquisition of key parcels or by establishing easements. The river floodway, the area that has historically experienced periodic flooding, is of particular importance as it provides water quality buffer, habitat, and recreational space.

A large amount of land adjacent to the river lies in highway, street and utility rights-of-way. This land, often considered a ‘leftover’ and factored out of the overall landscape equation, offers further opportunities to increase habitat and landscape connections.

The Plan divides the river corridor within the City of San Diego into six subsections, or reaches, based upon topographic characteristics and river condition. These reaches include the *Estuary* (extending from the ocean to the Mission Valley Preserve), *Lower Mission Valley* (extending east to I-15 and including Qualcomm Stadium), the *Confluence* (of Alvarado and Murphy Creeks with the San Diego River), the *Upper Mission Valley* (extending from Friars Road Bridge to Mission Trails Regional Park), the *Gorge* (within Mission Trails Regional Park), and the *Plateau* (upstream and east of Mission Trails Regional Park). There are issues and potentials that are shared by all of the reaches as well as those specific to each individual reach.





Estuary



Lower Valley



Confluence



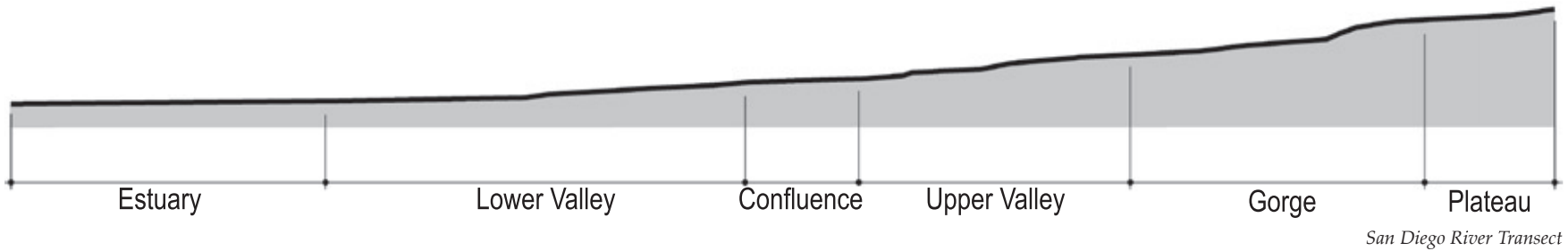
Upper Valley



Gorge

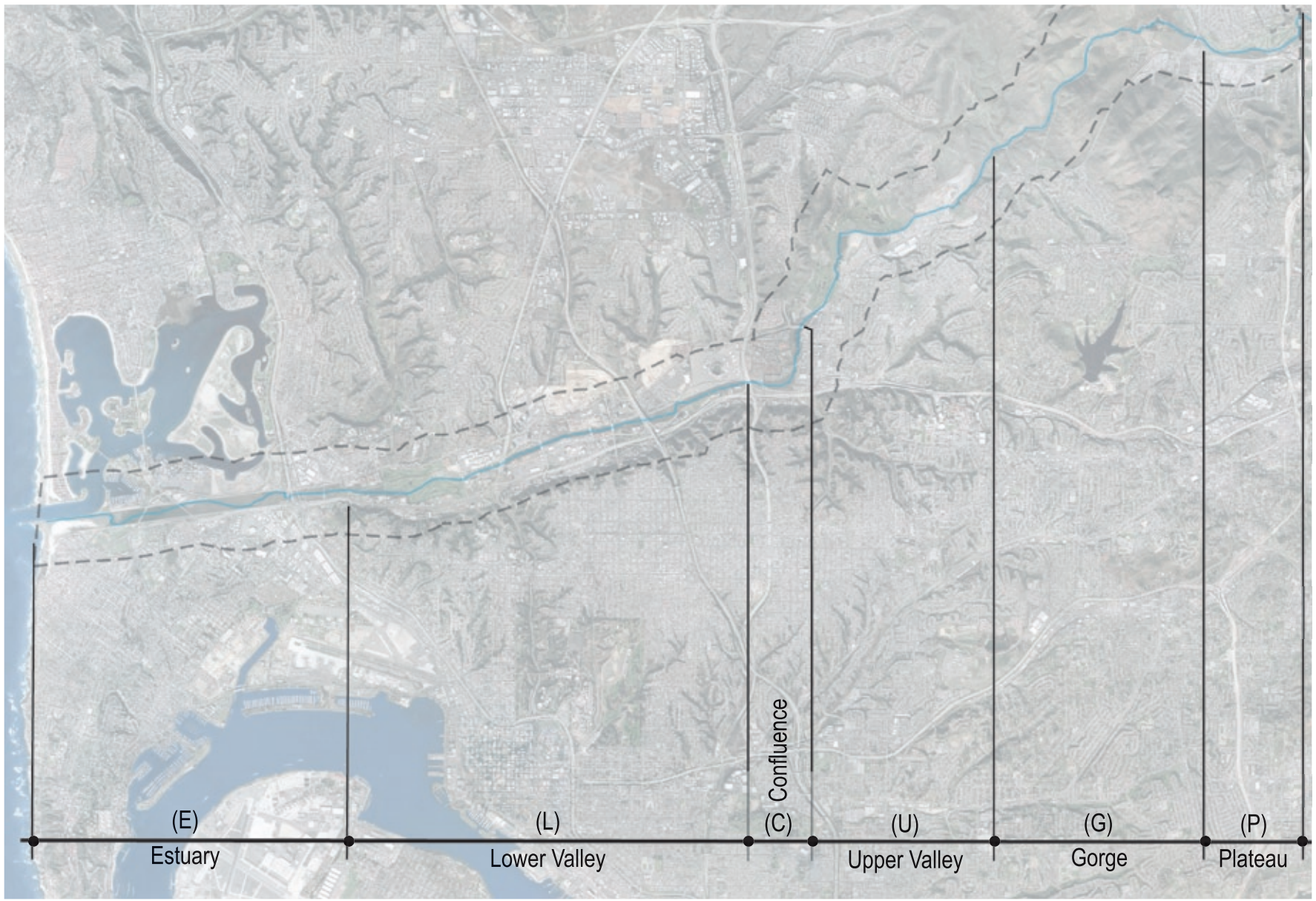


Plateau



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